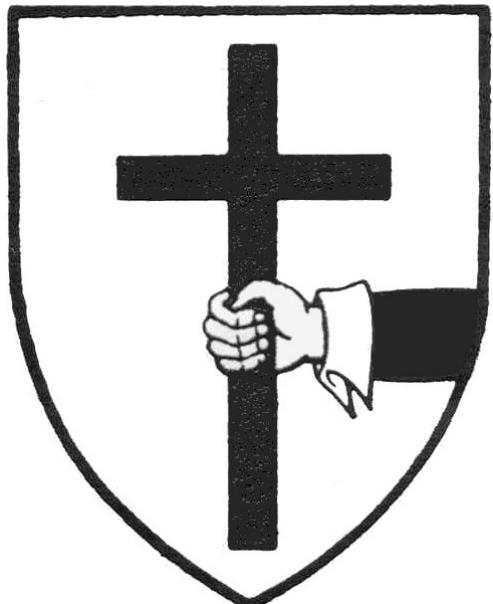


Ó Domhnaill Abá



O'Donnell Clan

Newsletter No. 36

Summer 2009



At the main entrance to San Pietro in Montorio before the commemorative ceremony.

Flight of the Earls Commemoration September 2008

The O'Donnell Clan Association and friends, while in Spain in 2002 commemorating the death of Red Hugh O'Donnell, decided to visit Rome in 2008 and commemorate the death of his two brothers Rory and Caffir in a similar manner. As their departure was part of the 'Flight of the Earls' it was furthermore agreed to commemorate their trek through Europe. Vincent O'Donnell, secretary of the Clan Association, set the wheels in motion and on the 9th Sept. last 50 people from Ireland, U.S.A., Canada and Australia assembled in Brussels for the beginning of a ten-day trip.

9th Sept. After a tour of Brussels we travelled north to Mechelen where we were to spend the first 2 nights. Having checked into our hotel we all went for our first meal together where some introductions and speeches were made. As most of us had been on the go for 36 hours we were glad to get an 'early night.'

10th Sept. Next morning after breakfast we had a guided tour of that city. Mechelen is mentioned in Tadhg Ó Cianáin's diary of the 'Flight' –

"Mechlin is a famous city of great extent, situated in a very pretty valley. Its houses and well-constructed buildings are very beautiful. There is a good, large river through the city, divided through all the streets of the town, with many bridges and boats. There is a very large cathedral in the centre of the city, built and ornamented with much labour and artistic work, having bright painted altars with beautiful statues, and a belfry, one of the largest and highest in Christendom. There is the tomb of an Irish saint in that church. God performed many wonders and miracles through him. He was the son of the King of Ireland. The people of the city venerate and reverence very much the tomb and image of that saint because of the greatness of the miracles God did through him. There are lighted waxen torches over the tomb both night and day, with divine service continually. There is one of the finest hospitals in the world in the city, where every class of sick person of all nations is admitted at the cost of the King of Spain."

The Irish saint is St. Rumoldus who was killed there by two local men whom he had denounced for their evil ways during his return from a pilgrimage to Rome in 775.

By noon we were off to the Irish College in Louvain where the Director General Malachy Vallely gave a fascinating talk outlining the part played by this college in Irish history over the last four centuries. It was here that a very important part of the Good Friday Agreement took place. Heads of the paramilitary groups involved in the conflict were brought together (some taken out of

prison); if they couldn't be brought to some agreement then there was no point in politicians in Belfast making decisions.

After lunch in the college, Malachy brought us on a very interesting tour of the town. It was then back to Mechelen for dinner after which an impromptu sing-song took place in the foyer of the hotel.

Next morning, the **11th Sept.** began our trek south. We roughly followed the route taken by the Earls, travelling on modern roads and by-passing many of the towns mentioned by Ó Cianáin. Our first major stop was in the city of Nancy, France. Ó Cianáin says –

"They went to Nancy, the Duke's chief city, a distance of two leagues. The Duke sent coaches and noblemen a distance from the Court to meet them. He received them with joy and honour, and his children did likewise. They remained for a time discoursing and conversing with one another. Afterwards they sat down to dinner. They were six in number, the Duke and his two sons, Ó Néill, the Earl, and the Baron of Dungannon. There were many honourable noblemen waiting on them. He brought them afterwards to his private apartment. There they remained for a time. They then took their leave and retired to their lodgings. In the old city itself there are many fine churches, in one of which there is a fourth part of, the body of Saint George, splendidly and reverently enclosed in a shrine of silver with many bright precious stones. The Duke himself has a great beautiful old palace in the city, having an excellent gallery and many splendid spacious apartments. There is a good tennis-court, where the Duke's children and nobles play, near his private room, where he can view and see their sport and games. There is a long stable, with many beautiful, well-shaped horses, which are not large, in the court opposite the palace. There is a place where horsemen and noblemen joust and ride, breaking lances on one another's breasts."

The Duke's palace, today a museum, doesn't seem very impressive and fronted onto a narrow street which made photographing it impossible. The place mentioned by Ó Cianáin where the horsemen 'joust and ride' is still there and on the day of our visit was being prepared for a book fair.

From Nancy we travelled to Colmar where we spent that night. Ó Cianáin says –

"That night they went three leagues to a remarkable city which is called Colmar, and is very strong, powerful, and extensive. Near to it is the most beautiful, wide, level, and fruitful plain in the greater part of Christendom. Heretics, however, occupy and inhabit it. They remained there that night"

12th Sept. Next morning after a short drive we reached Basil(Bâle) just inside the Swiss border. We

immediately went to see the cathedral. Ó Cianán writes –

They moved on to Bâle. Those who occupy and inhabit it are heretics. There is a very large church in the middle of the city in which there were images, and pictures of Luther and Calvin and many other wicked evil writers.

We saw no such pictures but rather found a church used by all denominations. During our visit we found a group of locals (the equivalent of the St. Vincent de Paul) who, at the end of every week, collect from local supermarkets foodstuff that has reached its sell-by date and sell it off to the poor at a nominal price.

We now moved on to Lake Lucerne and travelled southeasterly along its northern bank to Brunnen where we boarded a boat that took us to Flüelen. The ‘Earls’ had travelled the full length of the lake; we just did the last leg of the journey. The scenery along the lake was spectacular but low clouds obstructed our view during the boat crossing. For the boat trip and the Devil’s Bridge we were joined by His Excellency, James Sharkey, Irish Ambassador to Switzerland, his sister Maura., Graziella O Neill and her son - two descendants of Henry O’Neill, Catherine Rhatigan (from Co. Sligo married and living in Switzerland) along with her husband, Andrea and daughter, Anna.

We lunched on the boat. The Ambassador toasted our trip and what it stood for and after an hour we had reached Flüelen. From there we were directed by Andrea up the valley to the old path the ‘Earls’ would have travelled. Here we left the coach and in mist and a strong wind blowing through the valley we made our way to the bridge.

Ó Cianán writes - *The next day, Saint Patrick's day precisely, the seventeenth of March, they went to another small town named Silenen. From that they advanced through the Alps. Now the mountains were laden and filled with snow and ice, and the roads and paths were narrow and rugged. They reached a high bridge in a very deep glen called the Devil's Bridge. One of Ó Néill's horses, which was carrying some of his money, about one hundred and twenty pounds, fell down the face of the high, frozen, snowy cliff which was in front of the bridge. Great labour was experienced in bringing up the horse alone, but the money decided to remain blocking the violent, deep, destructive torrent which flows under the bridge through the middle of the glen. They stayed that night in a little town named Piedimonte. Their journey that day was six leagues.*

Yes, we paused for a moment before the crossing remembering Hugh O’Neill’s misfortune and the hardships these people had endured. Then with pipes playing and flags flying we processed across the bridge. On reaching the southern end we paused again for a few speeches in which we remembered

not only the ‘Earls’ but all those who had to leave Ireland for whatever reason over the past four centuries.

Here we said ‘Slán’ to those who had joined us at Brunnen and moved on over the Gotthard Pass. It was still misty. Somewhere near the top we entered a tunnel and on exiting on the southern side of the Alps we were greeted by a most beautiful sunny day with the Ticino Valley down below. What a contrast? We zigzagged our way to the valley floor and travelled southwards to Lugano, across the Italian border, past Milan and on to Lodi where we spent night 4. After dinner in the hotel we again had an impromptu sing song and some story-telling before retiring for the night.

13th Sept. Next morning we said ‘Slán’ to Deirdre Byrne (our guide) and the driver who had been with us since our arrival on the continent and boarded a Roman coach with Eda as courier. From Lodi we travelled in an almost straight line south easterly to Rimini. Why the ‘Earls’ did that rather than going directly south to Rome we are not certain but it seems they wished to visit the two important pilgrimage places of Loreto and Assisi. At Rimini we had lunch.

The following day they went three leagues to a strong fort belonging to the Pope named Savignano, and then to a great and famous city called Rimini. It was there they came in sight of the Adriatic Sea.

From there we travelled down along the coast to Loreto. Loreto has a large Basilica which contains the house in which the Blessed Virgin lived and in which Jesus grew up. How and why it moved from Nazareth to Loreto is everyone’s question and there are at least two explanations, one of which is plausible - a wealthy Byzantine family by the name of ‘Angeli’ had the house in Nazareth demolished and rebuilt in Loreto to save it from Muslim devastation. The most common explanation is that it was transported by ‘Angels.’

Whatever the story, the ‘Holy House’ has been in Loreto since the end of the 13th cent. and has been a major place of pilgrimage. Ó Cianán says -

Afterwards they pushed on to Loreto. Their journey was nine leagues. They stopped and rested there that night. On the next day they made a pilgrimage to that holy and highly-indulged church. They remained in the town a second night.

While viewing the Basilica a plaque on the wall was brought to our notice. On it is the Irish translation of

a Latin inscription on a plaque that hangs elsewhere within the same building. The Irish inscription gives briefly the history of how the ‘Holy House’ came to be there. The translation was done, according to the last paragraph - “Mise Roibeard Corbington, sagart d’Ord Íosa, noch d’astrigh go firinneach na nithe réamhráite as an original Laidne atá ar crochadh ‘san teampall so ‘sa mbliadhain MDCXXXV (= 1635).

Dochum glóire na Banóighe Ro-naomha, Muire.”

The font is an old Gaelic one and seimhithe is used rather than the modern ‘h’.

Ó Cianáin devotes thirty pages of his diary to the miracles of Loreto and then continues –

Having invoked and besought the holy Virgin Mary and her wondrous Son in that holy chapel, and having diligently performed their pilgrimage according to the regulation of the Church, Ó Néill and the Earl, the lords and the nobles who were with them, bade adieu to the holy image and the cross we have spoken of, to the holy chapel, and to the great church. They set out and proceeded on the road to Rome on the twenty-third of April, 1608, the day of the week being Wednesday.

14th Sept. We did likewise. On leaving Loreto we remembered that exactly a year earlier we were assembled at Rathmullan to commemorate the departure of the ‘Earls.’

It being Sunday we had planned to attend Mass in Assisi. There has been a great association between the O’Donnells and the Franciscans since Lady Nuala O’Donnell had the Franciscans brought to Donegal in 1474. We arrived there just in time for 12.00 Mass. The Basilica was crowded with over 30 priests and bishops on the altar. After Mass we met Fr. Fergus O’Farrel who had come from Rome to be our guide. We visited the tomb of St. Francis, had lunch and at 3.00 we departed Assisi, crossed over the Apennines and arrived in Rome at 6.00pm. There we met up with 18 other people who had just arrived and were joining us for the 4 days in Rome. At 8.00 pm we all went for our first meal together. A lovely dinner it was and we were entertained by 3 tenors singing well-known Italian songs and a few Irish songs as well.

Next morning, **15th September**, was our big day. It was the 400th anniversary of the death of Caffir O’Donnell; his brother Rory had died about six weeks earlier. We were now remembering these two young men (Rory 33, Caffir 25 years of age) who might have done great things had Fate dealt them a different hand. We also remembered all who were forced to leave Ireland and seek refuge or

employment in other lands over the last four centuries.

The Earl had a violent sickness and great pain during a period of eleven days. He made a full confession and received the Holy Sacrament. His soul separated from his body and he died, by the grace of God and the Church, after victory over the world and the devil, about midnight on Monday. On the following day, Tuesday the twenty-eighth of July, the feast of Saint Martha, the Earl was buried in the monastery of San Pietro Montorio. A large and splendid funeral in grand procession was ordered by his Holiness the Pope, and on either side of the body there were large numbers of lighted waxen torches and sweet, sad, sorrowful singing. It was enwrapped in the habit of Saint Francis, as he himself had ordered that it should be put about him.

When they had been some time there, the son of Ó Domhnaill died on the fifteenth day of September. It may well be believed that it was not through good fortune or the best of fate that it happened to Ireland that so many of the choicest of the descendants of Míl Easpáinne died suddenly, one after another, in a foreign and strange land, far removed from their own native soil. The son of Ó Domhnaill was buried in the habit of Saint Francis, after having had a great funeral and splendid cortege following him in procession, in the same monastery of San Pietro Montorio, in the same manner as the Earl, and close to his tomb.

We assembled in the Church of San Pietro de Montorio (where St. Peter reputedly was hanged upside down on a cross) and being a Franciscan Church was the burial place of the two O’Donnells and indeed Hugh O’Neill and son young Hugh. We were joined by Their Excellencies, Noel Fahey, Irish Ambassador to the Holy See, and Seán Ó Huiginn, Irish Ambassador to Italy, also Fr. John O’Keeffe O.F.M. St. Isidore’s Irish Franciscan College.

After a brief welcome by Vincent O’Donnell, Mass was celebrated by Fr. Fergus O’Farrell. Much of the Mass was in the Gaelic language with some in Latin. The latter would have been used in the Earls’ time. After Mass extracts from two poems were read and translated – ‘Anocht is Uaigneach Éire’ which bemoans the plight of the country after the departure of the Nobles –

*This night sees Éire desolate,
Her chiefs are cast out of their state;
Her men, her maidens weep to see
Her desolate that should peopled be.*

and Eoghan Ruadh Mhic an Bhaird’s lament for Nuala O’Donnell on seeing her alone at the grave of her brothers – “An Bhean fuair faill ar an bhfeart” which was translated years later by James Clarence Mangan as “O woman of the piercing wail”

*O woman of the piercing wail,
Who mournest o'er yon mound of clay
With sigh and groan,
Would God thou wert among the Gael!
Thou wouldst not then from day to day
Weep thus alone.*

Next, Conal Mac Cuinneagáin, gave an account of the Earl's journey and deaths in Rome after which the whole congregation formed a circle around the graves as a wreath (heather from Donegal) was laid on the grave of Rory and Caffir by Angelines O'Donnell Olson while Vincent O'Donnell played a lament on the bagpipes. That ended the ceremony. People stood around for a while taking photos etc.

Then all moved to the Villa Spada where we were guests of His Excellency, Noel Fahey, Irish Ambassador to the Holy See. Here we enjoyed food and drink and the warm sunshine in the garden. It was a most pleasant afternoon.

After Mass, Fr. John O'Keeffe had invited us to the Irish Franciscan House of Saint Isodore. Later that afternoon we took up his offer. We were warmly received and shown around by another Irish Franciscan, Fr. Louis Brennan. This house has had many associations with Ireland down the years. Alas! today there are only the two Irish men there - Fr. O'Keeffe and Fr. Brennan. The rest of the day was free.

16th Sept. Early next morning we had our own Mass at the Alter of Giuseppe in St. Peter's Basilica. Fr. Fergus O'Farrell celebrated and at the end we sang 'Faith of our Fathers.' Then we had a tour of the Basilica. Some went down to see the tombs of the popes including John Paul II and St. Peter. There also is the tomb of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' of Scotland. Others went up to the top of the dome. Then it was back to the hotel and later on in the afternoon we visited the church of St Mary Major's. Ó Cianáin writes –

On Thursday, the twelfth of the same month, Ó Néill and the Earl, and all that were along with them, set out for a pilgrimage of the seven great churches of Rome. They had with them the permission and authority of the holy Father that they might have exhibited to them all the relics of each church to which they would go. They began and commenced their meritorious pilgrimage in God's name at Santa Maria Maggiore. After having made their confessions and having received the Blessed Sacrament, there were exhibited to them the head of Saint Bibiana, the head of Marcellinus the Pope, one of the hands of Thomas the Apostle, the stole of Saint Girolamo, the stole and maniple, and another portion of the Mass vestments of Saint Thomas, bishop of Canterbury, the cradle in which our Saviour was in Bethlehem of Juda, the first clothes which the Virgin put around Him in His infancy, together with many other splendid relics.

We only saw the cradle and the clothes.

17th Sept. The following morning it was back to the Vatican, this time for the Papal Audience. The Audience, which is normally held in St. Peter's Square was this time in the Paul VI Hall. After the Holy Father had delivered his homily he spoke a short message in various languages. It was nice to hear our group's name 'Flight of the Earls Commemoration Group' being called out when it came to the English-speaking countries. Then some went off to see the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel while the rest returned to the hotel for a bus tour of Rome. Among the sites visited were – the Colosseum, Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain. The rest of the day was free.

18th Sept. The morning was free. At 3.00pm we were off again. We visited three churches, one contains the remains of Donnachadh Ó Briain, son of Brian Boru (High King of Ireland), another the heads of Saints Peter and Paul, the third the Scala Sancta – the Holy Stairs which Jesus descended on leaving the Praetorium during His passion. By 4.00pm we were at the Irish College. Here we were greeted by the rector, Monsignor Liam Bergin who gave us a brief history of the college and of course all the associations with Ireland. Irish priests are still trained there.

The Irish College in 2007 published a book entitled, 'from Ráth Maoláin to Rome' which is the greatest work yet on the Flight of the Earls. This book, edited by Nollaig Ó Muraile, incorporates Ó Cianáin's original text along with translation and notes done by Fr. Paul Walsh in 1916, translation and notes by Pádraig de Barra & Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich in 1972 and of course, Ó Muraile's own many observations, notes and useful additions. ISBN 978-88-901692-1-2 is well worth buying. I, Vincent O'Donnell, received a copy as a present on the final night for which I am really grateful.

At 7.30pm we went to a restaurant for our final meal together. Again, we were entertained by a group of tenors who sang various well known songs. Indeed we ended our evening there by singing 'O'Donnell Abu.' Later back in our hotel there were a few final speeches, many people thanked, a few presentations and a few toasts. And thus ended our ten-day 'Flight of the Earls' commemoration.

Next morning we went our separate ways back to normal living.

Flight Commemoration Photos.



1. Louvain
2. Bart O'Donnell, our President, speaks on Devil's Bridge
3. Touring Nancy
4. Loreto
5. Wreath laying by Angelines O'Donnell at O'Donnell grave
6. Thanking Irish Ambassador
7. St. Isadors
8. Papal Audience
9. To Trevi Fountain
11. Irish College

'O'Donnell Abu' ends as Radio Éireann signal tune.

Irish public broadcaster, RTÉ closed down its medium wave service at 3.00 pm on Easter Monday 24th March 2008 after 82 years on the air as it felt this service was obsolete. This meant too that its familiar signal tune, 'O'Donnell Abu' ceased to be broadcast. The full story of how 'O'Donnell Abu' became the signal tune of our national radio station appeared in newsletter No. 16. To hear the last playing of Radio Éireann's Interval Signal tune visit

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGfYH8cWxBA>

Earls remembered in Switzerland.

2008 was quite an eventful year for O'Donnells. In mid-March some of us travelled to Switzerland to take part in the Flight of the Earls commemoration there during St. Patrick's week. As it was during those same days four hundred years earlier the Irish nobles had travelled that way the Irish Ambassador, James Sharkey, felt this event had to be appropriately marked. Various stage productions and exhibitions took place during the week but the greatest event was the crossing by boat of Lake Lucerne and the march across the Devil's Bridge. Both are recounted in Tadhg Ó Cianain's diary. Anyone reading it will always remember the account of Hugh O'Neill loosing his money and valuables when the pack animal carrying it panicked on the bridge and fell down the ravine into the rushing waters far below. The money was never got (as far as we know); the donkey survived.



It was on a cold snowy afternoon that we, with flags flying and pipes playing, crossed the same bridge. After some speeches we moved on to a nearby church where we celebrated a commemorative Mass. Afterwards a plaque was unveiled and then we retired to the comfort of a local army base where we enjoyed a wonderful afternoon of food, drink, music, chat and some presentations. That same evening we celebrated our great Irish Feast Day with a banquet in Merlischachen.

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/multimedia/video/detail.html?siteSect=15045&sid=8867902>

Flight of the Earls Commemoration 'put to sleep.'

Just before the commemorative Mass in San Pietro on 15th Sept. '08 a young couple came into the church to make arrangements for their marriage which was taking place a few months later. He was from Letterkenny, she from Dublin. They were pleasantly surprised and asked if they could stay to the end. Seemingly they fell in love with the music and booked Catherine Rhatigan to play at their wedding in November. A few weeks later I was contacted by Catherine who had an idea. Having played at O'Donnell Clan Gatherings, at the Swiss commemoration and in San Pietro, she now had a 'certain feeling' for O'Donnells, O'Neills, Flight of the Earls and all that and had decided to pay a musical tribute to the Earls or as she put it, 'Put the Flight of the Earls Commemoration to sleep.' As the weeks passed a programme was planned and finally on the evening of the day of the wedding, 25th Nov. about 50 people assembled in the church of San Pietro for this musical tribute. About ten people performed in a programme of song, music and poetry that lasted about an hour. Most of the audience came from the embassies, the Irish College and from the Irish Club in Rome. It was a wonderful performance and a fitting tribute to those Irish nobles. And that, as far as I know, was the final commemoration of 2007/8.



Have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1g6y-i7o4w> full story in O'DA No. 29

Karen O'Donnell R.I.P.



It is always sad to have to report the death of a member. Karen and her husband, John O'Donnell (N.S.W.) attended the 2005 Clan Gathering. I received e-mails at Christmas and St. Patrick's Day afterwards. As the Swiss Commemoration drew near I had messages informing me of their intention to join us in spite of the fact that Karen had had quite a struggle with cancer. But now she felt good and wanted to prove it. They did turn up and enjoyed the few days. I heard no more until August last when I received the sad news that she had lost her battle. She was one brave girl as it was obvious in Switzerland that the dreadful disease had taken its toll, yet she smiled. We sympathise with her husband, John and her family, Neil, Ed and Rosie. May God be good to her.

Last issue of O'Donnell Abu newsletter

In the autumn of 1980 and 1982 O'Donnell Clan Gatherings were held in Donegal Town. They were organised by the local Development Association to prolong the tourist season and so continue employment. Many O'Donnells attended. As my wife and I lived within 10 miles we were involved in everything that was happening. During those weeks and indeed for months afterwards I was bombarded with questions about the Clan and everything associated with it. I'm no historian nor was I then but I could answer some of the queries. Finally, rather than answer each individual question, I decided to produce a newsletter answering FAQ and giving all other bits 'n' pieces, news etc to do with the Clan. The first issue appeared in 1985 but really was edited in '84. Thus O'Donnell Abu has been around for 25 years.

Although I, then, had a personal computer, Sinclair ZX, it was of no benefit for producing the newsletter. I typed the text with an old-fashioned typewriter, then brought typed sheets to a friend who had a 'word processor' and together we produced 'camera ready' documents which I then brought to local printers – Donegal Democrat. Photos had to be screened. They used 'off-set printing'. Today all is done in my home. It is just another example of how technology has transformed our lives. From here on I intend to use my website www.odonnellclan.com to publish bits of history and information about the Clan, advise of forth coming events, news items and anything else I consider of relevance. Already I notice web based facilities such as FaceBook providing a forum for Clan members.

Have a look at <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=2210464586>

I must say I received much support, encouragement, affirmation and financial assistance during those years. I also have to say that my wife and I met with and got to know many lovely people, made a lot of friends and had many great experiences as a result of this simple publication. And so I say to all of you a huge 'Céad Míle Buíochas.' Whatever money is left in the account I intend to use to have Masses said (by the Franciscans in Rosnowlagh) for the happy repose of those deceased and for the intentions of those alive.

Future Events

At present the only event planned is a trip to Austria in 2012. And why nothing till then? Well at our last committee meeting it was felt that this is not a good time for any major event. First of all, here in Ireland, grants and financial assistance for clan gatherings and festivals have been greatly reduced; secondly fewer visitors from the U.S. are coming to Ireland because of the weak dollar and the financial climate in general. Bad as things are at present there is great uncertainty about the future. In the meantime keep an eye on www.odonnellclan.com